

THE ROMANCE OF MADAME REPIN

Experiences as a "Fugitive" to the United States of the Wife of the Russian Painter

BY HERMAN BERNSTEIN

Mme. Repin, the brilliant wife of the Russian painter, Ilya Repin, has had a romantic career. In her reminiscences which she gave me when I visited the Repins in Finland she spoke of the dreams and yearnings of her youth.

The story of her childhood she regards as monotonous, for it is the same old story of old-fashioned education suppressing the individuality of the child, while this individuality is struggling and craving for real life.

"Every environment, like every act, is jealous and limited; it is difficult to break away from it, but only after such a rupture commences the liberation of the individual," says Mme. Repin.

Mme. Repin begins by telling her age. She was born in 1852. Her father was governor of one of the central provinces in Russia. She was reared amid luxury. But she was more sensitive and impressionable than other children of her sphere. While yet a little girl, her mind was often occupied with thoughts of religion.

"I was thinking of the unattainable perfection and greatness of God and his favorites of whom I have read in the biblical stories," says Mme. Repin, in describing that period of her life. "Abraham appealed to me most of all, for he was not sorry to sacrifice to God his only son."

"But what if God should suddenly command me to give Him without murmur my dear dolly Tasha, my beloved Tashenka? I passionately pressed her to my bosom and my heart was bleeding."

"Yes, I must make the sacrifice," I whispered, after a long struggle with myself. "I must do it, if He demands it."

"Sometimes I tried to sacrifice to God my comfort. As soon as I would cover myself cozily with my blanket and warm myself, as soon as sweet slumber commenced to close my eyes, I would jump out of my bed quickly and, kneeling, would pray for my mother. But very often my head would recline on the pillow while I prayed, and I would fall fast asleep."

When the little girl, Helen, was eleven years old the governor and his family moved to St. Petersburg. She found herself amid new surroundings and new friends. Her education was looked after by her mother. The little girl was sent to a German school.

Shortly after his arrival in St. Petersburg the governor died. Mme. Repin depicts vividly the funeral of her father and the change in her mode of life. Her mother grew ever stricter toward her and punished her severely for every trifle that displeased her.

At the age of sixteen Helen made her debut in society. A private performance was given in their house, and she participated in it with great success.

"The success which crowned our efforts that evening was beyond all our expectations," Mme. Repin recounts. "Flowers were thrown to us from all sides; we were applauded enthusiastically, and when I came into the parlor, still agitated, my eyes beaming with happiness, I heard all kinds of flattering compliments."

"But one thing surprised me—my mother was not among the guests. I went to look for her in the other rooms. 'Thinks went too well tonight,' I thought, 'am I on the eve of a misfortune?'"

"I found her at last alone in the drawing room, and by the expression of her face I understood that something terrible must have happened."

"Mademoiselle," she said to me, "this is the way you are taking advantage of my goodness and confidence? I live for you alone, and you repay me with falsehoods and deceptions. You go out with our chambermaid. How dare you behave like that! How dare you go slumming without my knowledge!"

"And my mother, beside herself for rage, removed her slipper and struck me on the cheek with it."

On the following day the girl was incarcerated in the pink drawing-room for three days.

"You shall stay here for three days upon a diet of bread and water," her mother told her sternly. "This will make you understand the meaning of a mother's authority. I am bringing you up according to the latest system of education. I am guarding you against outside influences, while you are going out with a chambermaid."

And she locked the door of the drawing room.

A year later the differences and misunderstandings between mother and daughter became still more intense.

"The dramatic moment arrived when a mother for the first time clashes with the individual will power of the child that has been reared according to her own ideals and her own aims," says Mme. Repin.

In the meantime the girl had fallen under the influence of a new friend,

Yeva, whom she was not allowed to meet. She therefore met her clandestinely and corresponded with her.

"Yeva's influence upon me was very deep," says Mme. Repin, "and I often spoke of my dreams of a modest life wholly devoted to religion and work. My mother was in despair. She could not understand where I had learned all these absurd things."

"The end will be that everybody will point at you in derision," she would say to me angrily.

"But the greatest storm was called forth when I decided never to wear any corsets and heels on my shoes. Neither the incarceration for four days, nor the rage of my mother, nor the reprimand of my English governess could shake my determination."

Mme. Repin describes how a friend named Laura recommended to her the reading of such books as "Self-Help" by Samuel Smiles.

"In this book you will see what great results may be attained by one's own powers," Laura said.

"Does such a book exist?" I exclaimed, jumping up from my seat. "I have long been dreaming of accomplishing something, but I never knew how to commence."

"You will read this and you will know," said Laura firmly.

"Perhaps there are solutions in that book of other questions, too?" I asked timidly. "I am tormented by certain problems of which I have never dared speak to anyone."

"If you don't dare, you need not speak of these problems," said Laura with a cold smile.

"Oh, no! I interrupted her hastily. 'I will tell it to you, because I trust you.' And making sure that no one was standing behind the door, I sat down close to her and said in a scarcely audible voice: 'Tell me, what do you think of those, you know, of those who are against the government, who protest and explode?'"

"You speak of the nihilists?"

"Yes, but for heaven's sake, not so loud. I thought so much about them—their acts are brutal, but at the same time they are sacrificing their own lives."

"Of course. They are fanatics, martyrs."

"Yes," I continued, "that's true, but they are wasting their powers upon an unnecessary struggle. The government is developing along certain lines, and you cannot hasten matters."

"They are not allowed to do what Peter I did, that for which he is called Peter the Great," said Laura dryly. "It is the force of civilization."

"I looked at her confusedly. 'I had never before thought of Peter the Great from that point of view. But I know that the Nihilists are wrong,' I said mysteriously. 'I am very sorry that I am unable to sympathize with them. But how good it must be to be absorbed by some idea and be ready to die for it!'"

"Laura did not answer. There was an expression of cold energy, almost of anger, upon her face."

"She knows what idea to die for," I thought. "If I could only gain her confidence she would surely tell me everything."

"Laura sat silently. Suddenly her face brightened. She looked at me and nodded her head."

"Very well," she said. "I am glad. At school I always thought you were only a spoiled aristocrat, now I see that you may develop into a real human being."

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people express such cravings? For instance, how is the craving for the beautiful expressed?"

"By creating beautiful things," I said impulsively.

"Of course, the people who create the beautiful are the best to express such a craving, therefore we shall have artists in our society. Now, the representatives of truth?"

"Well, of course, we must have writers, poets. I exclaimed joyfully. 'We must have them. But if we go on in this way, we shall have only talents. What of those who have no talents and yet are yearning and craving?'"

"We can divide the members into two categories, but the talented people will be the important members of this society," said Laura.

"Hurray," I exclaimed. "Here is the name: 'The Society for the Mutual Encouragement of Talented People.'"

"Splendid!"

"But where are our representatives of kindness?" I asked.

"Where there are beauty and truth, there is also kindness," replied Laura.

"The society was formed and the girls worked hard to make it a success. But several young men invited to the meeting, disrupted the organization by ridiculing both the aims and the methods of the organizers."

Mme. Repin then relates how the chasm between her conceptions of life and those of her mother was growing ever wider and wider, and how at last she decided upon a definite step which was to change her life.

"I remember distinctly the day on which our future was decided in the most unexpected manner," she says. "Olga came up to the house, in a state of great agitation. She told us that a man was found dead in the street near her house, and that the physician declared that he had died of starvation."

"Her words produced a profound impression upon me."

"It is impossible to go on living this way," I said. "I cannot remain idle when there is so much misery about me. I don't want to remain any longer in this cold, egoistic and false sphere where the needy are not assisted. I am going away from this sphere, but not to a monastery, as Yeva did."

"I am going with you," exclaimed Laura. "I have grown tired of these lessons."

"I am also going with you," said Olga. "We shall make all efforts to relieve the sufferings of the people as much as we can."

"Yes, yes," I said, in a state of stupor, "we must go away far, very far from this dull, false life, we must live a quiet life amidst nature, give all our power to the service of the unfortunate and the humiliated."

"But you need not rejoice so much," said Laura. "Only in books and on the stage is it so easy to go away, but in real life it is different."

"This remark poured cold water on my enthusiasm."

From outside the United States proper there came, in this group, six letters, two each from Canada and the Canal Zone, one from Mexico, and one from a native of France, temporarily resident in this country.

From the larger cities came forty-four, or 25 per cent, of the inquiries; seventeen from New York (including Brooklyn); seven from Chicago; four from Boston; three from Washington and three from Minneapolis; two each from Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Cincinnati; and one from Columbus.

Twenty-eight writers directly state that they have had no experience, yet the willingness to work and endure hardship and the expressed decision obviously based on careful consideration, do not indicate a mere commiseration's weariness nor a mere desire to dabble in suburban farming.

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not go on Thursday. Laura gave her back her passport, her money and other documents. Helen felt that her knees were trembling and she leaned against the piano.

"All is ended between us," said Laura, an expression of extreme anger on her face. "You may wait for anybody you like. I am going to-morrow."

"Very well," answered Helen calmly. "This shows your love for me. Let me have my steamship ticket and I will go."

About ten minutes later Laura gave her the ticket. Helen said goodbye and walked out into the dark corridor. She heard the sounds of the Chopin nocturne. Laura was playing the same piece she had played when they were dreaming of their future.

The Countess came and made an effort to persuade Helen to abandon her plan of going to America and rather accompany her to her estate. Helen said:

"Countess, at present I have no right to a happy, quiet life. I must first be able to stand on my feet. I must become independent. I must work for others, and only after I have done this, I shall come to you."

While Helen was waiting for the next steamer for America, something happened which again changed her plans. Her mother suddenly decided to send her to Dresden where some of her friends were staying. She gave her 150 roubles and sent a maid along with her.

After a brief stay in Dresden Helen went to Hamburg where she embarked for New York.

Madame Repin describes how she was taken to the steamer with the other emigrants and what she experienced during her trip in steerage. The emigrants were telling one another the stories of their life. An Austrian came over to Helen and told her in detail all his past.

Among the passengers she met Mr. and Mrs. Giroud, American farmers who had emigrated from Switzerland, and who were now returning home from a visit to Europe. The Girouds took an interest in Helen. In the evening of the ninth day at sea Helen told Mr. Giroud the story of her life, and after that they spent the rest of the time on the steamer together.

"On the twelfth day, toward evening, we noticed a dark strip on the horizon—Land! Land! That was America. All hearts were seized with boundless joy. The weather was beautiful, the sun was shining. The emigrants were telling one another the stories of their life. An Austrian came over to Helen and told her in detail all his past."

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MEN WANT TO BE FARMERS.

But Women and Children Said Not to Be Plying for Rural Jobs.

"Does anybody want a farm?" was recently asked in the "World's Work" by the editors of that publication. Inquiries of three weeks following the appearance of the issue containing the inquiry 181 replies had been received and others came later.

In 194 of these 181 letters the amount of available capital was definitely stated. The total was \$354,550, distributed as follows: Eight applicants had more than \$10,000 apiece, eight another eight had between \$5,000 and \$10,000; sixty-nine had between \$1,000 to \$5,000; seventeen had less than \$1,000, and two announced themselves as without any capital at all. The average was \$2,110 for the 184 persons.

It has been determined by investigation and analysis that, in the State of New York at least, the smallest amount with which the average man

can hope successfully to become an independent farm owner is \$5,000. This sum marks the division line in that State between the successful farm owner and the renter or sharer.

For those persons who contemplate farming in a less developed country, or upon new or abandoned farm land which can be bought for from \$10 to \$20 per acre, the minimum amount of capital necessary may be reduced nearly one-half, dependent always upon the willingness of the farmer to undergo for a time certain discomforts and privations.

Seventy inquiries, about 40 per cent, came from the North Atlantic States; forty-four, or 25 per cent, from the North Central States east of the Mississippi; and twenty-four, or 14 per cent, from the North Central States west of the Mississippi. In other words, 75 per cent of all the inquiries came from the States where agriculture is most highly developed, and presumably most successful.

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Twenty-eight writers directly state that they have had no experience, yet the willingness to work and endure hardship and the expressed decision obviously based on careful consideration, do not indicate a mere commiseration's weariness nor a mere desire to dabble in suburban farming.

Men of forty-five years of age or more write of their desire to get to farms, not merely as a retreat for their

later years, but as a good business opportunity for their active life. One man, indeed, describes himself as being sixty-four years young, and with the feeling of a man of forty. Two letters come from women who are planning to own and manage their own farms on a business basis.

The desire for farms is undoubtedly the result of a wish really to practice agriculture, and not merely to speculate in land values. In but one case was the agricultural value of the land disregarded, and the possibility of its being a good investment for a few years' made paramount. Twenty-three inquiries are merely "feelings" with no definite section yet in mind, although in several cases a distinct type of farming had already been chosen.

On the other hand, twenty inquiries aim at New York or New Jersey; eight point toward New England; twelve toward Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma; and ten toward Iowa, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. The natural result

of recent developments, advertisement and progress in regard to specific localities is of course apparent. Sixteen inquiries are directed toward Florida, and twenty toward the Pacific Northwest.

Atlantic States. Six inquiries are directed according to the dictates of their health, in high altitudes, or in arid or warm climates. There are only two inquiries about homestead possibilities. There is one case, apparently, that does much to prevent a wider purchase and occupation of farms—namely, the averting of women to farm life.

"Does anybody really want a farm?" writes one man. "Yes, more than one-half the male citizens of the large cities, especially those who were country born. When I was forced by overwork and ill health to leave business, I told my acquaintances I was going onto a farm. They almost all said: 'Oh, how I would like to buy a place in the country and go to farming.' Asked why they did not, they said, with equal sincerity: 'My wife

or my children would not live in the country.' Or: 'I must first educate my children, but I would go in a minute if it was not for them.'"

"It is always the same story. When I go back and meet them their families are hopelessly tied to the town's attractions—department stores, theaters, clubs and social conditions, even though it involves a third story flat, and a vitiated atmosphere. The town want the farm; the women want the town and its pretty things rather than the life of a farmer's wife. Convert the women and you will be able to answer the question as to whether the cows and the land are all cry and no wool."

Oregon Rancher's Rattlesnake Kill.
Pendleton correspondence Portland Oregonian.

The title of champion rattlesnake killer of Umatilla county undoubtedly goes to James Fix, a Coombs (Cotton) rancher, who killed 275 of the reptiles one day last week. The skins were brought down to the city and sold to Major Lee Moorehouse of this city. He also obtained twenty pounds of oil which has a market value of \$250.

Smart Maine Girls.

Monocouque correspondence Rockland Times.

Monocouque Island in Knox county has the smartest girls in Christendom—that's correct. Don't make any difference whether they are 9 years old or 90 years old, smartness is a quality that never fades. Evelyn Simmons, who for instance is only 10 years old, and who just the same "fitted" up a team of oxen, drove 'em to the farm, delivered a load of goods, came home, fed the cows and did the chores.

Then too there's Mrs. Mary Polard Elwell. Eighty years bridge the lapse between Evelyn and her, for Mrs. Elwell is 80 years of age. But she recently said she had ridden a horse and she said it nipped a day.

Lake Michigan Icebergs.
From the Milwaukee Sentinel.

Sailing across Lake Michigan on Monday before a stiff southwesterly wind was one of the biggest icebergs that have ever formed on the lake. It comprised the vast fields of ice which have built up helplessly of Chicago for four days, and which had been a dangerous navigation on the east shore.